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Why You Should Train Your Pet Using Positive Reinforcement Methods



*"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember,
show me and I learn."*

—Benjamin Franklin

The quote doesn't only apply to humans—it applies to

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our pets, too. Using negative training techniques—telling your pet “no” or punishing her when she misbehaves—is like *telling* her what you want. And, you’re telling her in a way that may instill fear. These methods have been proven to be less effective than *involving* your pet in her training by positively reinforcing appropriate behaviors.

Gone are the days of being an alpha to display dominance over our pets. Despite how we may have trained our pets in the past, we have learned that it is possible to be a good leader without domination. In fact, great training is one that creates a partnership between the owner and pet. It allows both parties to work together toward a goal, and it strengthens the human-animal bond as a result.

With positive reinforcement training, rewards—praise and treats—are used to encourage desired behaviors. The rewards are given once an action is appropriately executed to encourage more of that behavior.

How does positive reinforcement training work?

What motivates your pet? What is her favorite treat? Does she get excited when you give her praise? When you know what motivates your pet, you’ll be able to train her using positive reinforcement techniques.

Here’s how you can train your dog to sit:

1. Once you’ve chosen the high-value reward, you will also choose a marker—a positive word (“yes!”) or a clicker—to mark the moment your pet sits. When

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she sits, immediately click or say “yes,” and follow with a treat.

2. Choose a simple, one-word command (“sit”) for the desired behavior. All family members must use the same word for the same command to be consistent.
3. Say “sit.” Your pet may not understand what you mean at first, but as soon as she sits, mark the behavior and immediately give her a treat.
4. Every time you say “sit” and your pet sits, click or say “yes” and give her a treat. It won’t take long for her to learn what she’s supposed to do when you say “sit,” and she’ll develop a positive association and will want to complete the behavior you desire.
5. Keep training sessions short and sweet—typically around 5 to 10 minutes.
6. As the command is established, begin to decrease the number of treats given until the rewards are no longer necessary for that particular command.
(But, you never have to stop providing verbal praise when your pet obeys a command!)

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What are the benefits of using positive reinforcement training?

Positive reinforcement training methods:

- Are less stressful — A [2014 study](#) published in the *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* found that “training methods based on positive reinforcement are less stressful and potentially better for [dogs’] welfare.”
- Build trust and create a stronger human-animal bond — Trust is a key component of positive reinforcement training. When you use positive methods, you’ll build a relationship based on trust, cooperation, and positive associations with your pet. Teachable moments happen daily, and it is our job to build trust based on these moments. When we foster trust with our pets, it gives them the confidence to know when actions should be continued or ceased. Associations are created in these periods of time, and history will be repeated from these memories.
- Decrease problem behaviors — When dogs are bored, they are more likely to get into trouble. By adding a couple of short training sessions every day, your dog will be mentally stimulated, you’ll be teaching her new behaviors that you approve of, and you’ll mitigate any unwanted behaviors, like excessive barking or chewing.
- Can be used by the entire family with just about any pet — Dog, cat, horse, bird... most animals will respond positively to praise and rewards. And, any member of the family—children included—can safely participate in positive training sessions.

Through the years, we have learned there are effective ways to train our pets without inflicting harm or fear. Positive reinforcement training requires consistency and appropriate expectations. It opens the lines of communication between you and your pet, which gives you the chance to slow down, be patient, learn what motivates her, and cultivate trust.

Questions about training your pet? [Call our office](#) at 203-748-8878.

By [Digital Empathy](#) | February 5th, 2019 | [Uncategorized](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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